

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
JOINT COMMITTEE on PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION**

and ORDINANCE

PUBLIC HEARING

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2012

6:00 PM

ATTENDANCE

Committee on Public Safety and Transportation

Council members: Co-chairs; Lyons and Colon; Taylor-Moye, Paoletto

Committee on Ordinances

Council members: Co-chair Paoletto, Martinez, M. McCarthy, Curwen

Council President McCarthy

Co-chair Paoletto called the public hearing to order at 6:13 pm.

He announced that due to the lengthy list of people that signed up to speak, there would be a 2-minute time limit.

39-11 Proposed Resolution to enforce a curfew for Youth, age sixteen years and younger.

Comments and statements have been summarized:

Clyde Nicholson – stated that he was there to speak about the curfew. He stated that at first, he thought the curfew was a good idea in view of the recent killings. He recalled another recent incident where two people were shot in their apartment and yet another incident where a man was shot in front of his mother's house. He questioned what will happen during the morning hours in terms of enforcing the curfew. He didn't feel a curfew was the answer, especially when jobs for youth are scarce. He further talked about guns on the street and what could be done. He questioned what will happen if an officer stops an innocent youth and he emphasized that they needed to deal with the

crime element that results from guns. He questioned how many guns have been taken off the street. He spoke about the youth named B.J. and his mother who were killed in their home by an illegal gun.

Co-chair Paoletto briefly interjected to state that the item will not be voted on tonight because it was still tabled in committee.

David Gordan – stated he was there to speak against the ordinance for the curfew. He read a statement that referenced gangs that are fueled by the drug trade. He recalled a prior meeting that addressed the issue and a discussion to explore different initiatives that are already in place. He stated that he developed a model program during 1994 that addressed youth violence and a forum was held during 2010. He expressed that there was no clear support from the elected officials about dismantling the group at the time. He went on to say that gangs have continued to infiltrate the schools and they try to recruit the students. He said he felt they needed a holistic plan of approach to respond to the gang and drug problems in schools. He said the youth curfew would be meaningless and it won't have a lasting impact. He offered his services to create a program that he hoped would have long lasting results.

Karen Jackson – stated that she wasn't initially aware of the proposed curfew, but she researched the matter on her own. She expressed that it was awful that a 14 year old was killed. She relayed some text that was related to a parent's responsibility that has legal custody of a child and she didn't feel a curfew would work. She thought the only way to solve the problem was to have youths transition to work programs and holistic program to possibly avoid prison.

Amos Brown - stated that if they were planning to impose a curfew, it needs to be put on the gangs. He said there's a gang operating out of Norwalk and they have infiltrated the cities of Bridgeport and Stamford. He questioned what good government funds were if they don't address the problem. He expressed what it felt like to lose a loved one and he thought the State of Connecticut could do better because as far as he was concerned, they have failed along with the city council. He questioned when it will stop. He said a law should be passed to impose stiff sentences for murder that might be a deterrent.

Jesse Lawrence - stated he was 18 years old and a student at Central High School. He said he didn't feel a curfew would stop a bully or from drugs being sold. He stressed that it's a parent's responsibility to know where their children are at all times – *quoting the old television advertisement that stated "It's 10 o'clock, do you know where your children are"?* He went on to say that they needed more programs, a task force on the street and more athletic programs. He emphasized that they have to make a change in the community. He mentioned that he was from New York and there's a cop on every street, which is lacking in Bridgeport. Overall, he said what was needed were more positive programs so the youth have someone to look up to.

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Virgin Martinez - stated that a curfew was a good idea. She said a 14 year old should not be on the street at 1:00 am, noting that that they should be home doing homework.

David Goodwin - stated that a curfew was a good idea, but that it wouldn't be a good idea in some areas. He pointed out that the ordinance on the books wasn't even followed. He emphasized that gang violence in the city is out of control and he said they are shooting each other over colors. He thought the ordinance should be passed to prohibit the wearing of gang colors that will curb the behaviors that are associated with gangs, such as that that can be seen on the Internet. He further stressed that he has observed red color against blue color. He said he didn't feel the ordinance would work as it is now. He agreed that it's a parent's responsibility to look out for their child and he said measures should be taken to put the responsibility on the parent, by imposing a fine if they don't. Overall, he said he didn't feel anything would be done about the problem. He also thought that part of the problem is that many parents may have a drug problem themselves and if they don't get help, they are unable to control their own kids.

Carol Nunley - stated that she was a member of P.A.C.K. She relayed that she recently judged essays that were written by students with the topic of how *"parents have influenced youth"*. She said what she felt was missing was an important issue on the curfew was that they should seek opinions from the youth and conduct surveys on how they feel. She said they should address the problem of loitering in front of stores and neighborhood watch. She read some excerpts from a couple of the essays that highlighted varied issues, such as: creating a better world; not letting anyone define you and leaving the world better than you found it.

Lyle Jones – stated that many will wake up and find excuses why they can't be done and reasons it should be done in relation to the curfew. He said he was for the curfew because they are dealing with an entirely new generation. He stressed that if they don't make the parents responsible, then it's a problem. He relayed that he works in the school system and he has witnessed complete disrespect. He recalled that he had a curfew as a youth that was set by his father and because of it, he was kept out of harms way. He shared that he eulogized the funeral for the 14 year old and he relayed how the CT Post portrayed the killing. He didn't feel he was respectfully portrayed due to the pictures that were taken of him with wads of money in his hand. Overall, he emphasized that it's a lost generation of children. And although a curfew is part of the solution, he said they needed to come up with other ways to address the matter. He repeated that the parents have to be more responsible and they need to come up with strategies and a plan to save our children.

George Cruz – stated that he was a resident of Bridgeport. He made it clear that he was there to place blame on anyone. He felt that as long as blame is laid, there won't be any solutions created. He said that he previously worked in Massachusetts as an organizer to address the gang issue. He also agreed that the problem falls strictly on the City of Bridgeport

parents, not the city council, the police etc. He thought they should come up with solutions and conduct a solid survey in schools to ask the youth what they want them to do to be held accountable. He stressed that they need a strong partnership, put their differences aside and come up with solutions. Overall, he thought a curfew should be imposed on the parents and that it wasn't the city council's responsibility. He offered his phone number if anyone wanted to contact him to discuss the matter further – (203) 360-6276.

Bishop Rick Griffith - stated that he was a pastor in one of the community churches and the new president of the East End NRZ. He mentioned the ordinance that was adopted in 1994. He said he didn't feel there was enough ammunition to address the curfew matter because it needs help. He further felt that should turn the table and ask the question "*Do you know where your parents are*"? He relayed that many parents have to work two jobs and the youth are left without guidance during the evening. In the same respect, he thought that some parents are afraid of their child, noting that some will call 911 if they think they're being disciplined too much. He noted the key issues that he thought added to the problem, such as: violent video games; lack of education; the drop out rate and illiteracy. He stressed that they need to work with parents and children to motivate them and make them feel like they have someone to turn to, so they don't have to turn to gangs.

Karen Smith - stated that she lived on the east end. She relayed that she was there to speak as a parent. She stressed that she only wants for the children, what she wants for herself. She thought that with the curfew in place, there could be situations where criminalizing someone could occur just for being out a certain time. She felt that each, should teach one. She went on to say that there wasn't any opportunity up and down the east end and many wake up to negativity. She said if they are going to use the police, they should be used for positive interaction. She expressed that without opportunity the problems will continue. She further felt that if the ordinance is brought back to the table and tweaked to the 21st century, it will result in the same things happening.

William Durham – stated that he was in support of the curfew. He relayed that there had been a lot of talk about the parents and even though parents may not be doing their job; it doesn't mean the youth shouldn't be held accountable for their behavior. He mentioned that the Sheehan Center closes at a certain time, noting that it's a place for youth to go during the day, but the curfew will only be effective at night. He thought it could be successful if it's supported by law enforcement. He expressed that he was brought up to be respectful. Overall, he urged passing of the curfew ordinance.

Cecil Young – stated that in terms of setting a curfew, he thought there should be a sensitivity training component in the neighborhood to deal with youths. He relayed that many people live in fear. He recalled that in the past, they had something to look forward to, such as summer programs and other activities. He stressed that some kids

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have a mother or father in jail and many have no guidance and don't see any future of going to college. He thought that federal and state dollars should be sought to encourage business people to get involved and sponsor a youth. He agreed that they need to get parents involved and teach them how to engage their kids from a positive perspective. He didn't feel the police are trained to be "*My brother's keeper*". He went on to say that it's hard to change people's habits, but he urged sensitivity training. He said if the curfew is enforced, they need to be very cautious of profiling and the police will need to be aware of how to treat situation to avoid profiling.

Onte Johnson - stated that he was a community activist and organizer. He said he was responsible for ten boy scout programs and (300) youth in Bridgeport. He expressed that he cares about the kids and the community and he was in favor of the curfew. He mentioned that he serves on various boards. He went on to say that even though there are many frustrations regarding the issue, it has to be addressed as a joint effort and they need to talk about some solutions. He posed the following suggestions:

- a) If a curfew is enforced they need to implement work permits for a youth that has a job. They should have the work permit on them to show the police should they be stopped.
- b) They should mandate that all parents with kids in the school system receive training before the first day of class to help them deal with their child more effectively.
- c) There should be more police officers on the street, on foot at night. Their presence will break up groups that are gathering.
- d) There should be after school programs and extended school hours, which will help promote better test scores.

He offered his phone number should anyone want to contact him for further discussion. (347) 525-6489.

Craig Kelly - spoke about all the bright youth in the city, noting that they often get marked with being non-productive. He stressed that many kids are productive. He agreed that they need more community policing. He mentioned a study that he did a few years ago on black crime and he recalled that during the 1990's; the crime rate was very high. He said the curfew won't solve all the problems in the city and in his opinion, he thought that violence is a learned behavior. However, he said anything learned can be unlearned, especially if it's caught early. He said there were three factors that contribute to violence that are drugs, alcohol and guns. He asked that a program be considered for the creation of a self-esteem camp. Unfortunately, he expressed that he didn't feel the last homicide would be the last in Bridgeport. Overall, he said the matter needed to be discussed ongoing and consistent to be the public involved.

Kenneth Mohammed – stated that he resided on the north end of Bridgeport. He talked about retraining the police so they don't assume that any youth on the street is getting into trouble, because he felt there could be other reasons for them being there. He spoke about addressing the problem in the Nation of Islam and he agreed that guns

contribute to violence. Overall, he said they need to consider other measures to address the issue.

David Greenridge – stated there were a lot of issues to address; such as problems in the home, education etc. He felt that more programs needed to be created as a positive influence. He didn't feel that a curfew would change the person and one solution is to add on programs – he stated the quote that *"It takes a village to raise a child"*!

Crystal Mack - stated that she has lived in the city for 34 years. She relayed that the youth are the most oppressed people in the world; many are saddened, have suffered the loss of parents etc. and the only thing they see is that they're bad through law enforcement. She expressed that they needed to treat people the way they want to be treated. She further expressed that kids used to be given a chance and a life. She shared what's it's like to be discriminated against having grown up in the Town of Trumbull with very few minorities. She stressed that parents should be back in the schools as overseers of their kids. She said they should teach kids and then they will see a change and growth. Overall, she felt what was needed was more positive leadership.

Priscilla Gaynor & Denepha Edmadson - approached the committee. Ms. Gaynor stated that she was a senior at Harding High School and she and Ms. Edmadson were both student council members. She said as far as the curfew issue, she didn't understand the debate because she has seen people that she went through middle school with not make it to high school. She went on to say that each killing that has occurred happened at a late night party or a gathering with youth. She felt that if the youths know there will be consequences, then it will serve to change their behavior. She emphasized that that are too many kids dying and exposed to violence. She posed the question to ask which parent they know that wants to see their child out in the street after dark. She felt there should be rules set and followed that would make youth safe after a party. Overall, she felt strongly that parents, teachers and students need to make the effort.

Tom McMillian - stated that he went to high school in this building years ago. He said he was in Vietnam and he has experienced ducking bullets. He stressed that some parents are scared of their kids. He felt they need a curfew as a start and although it's not the complete answer, it's a start.

Barnabas Duberry - stated that he worked with young people every Friday and he runs a basketball program on Friday night. He expressed that one problem young people have is that they have observed Bridgeport being reactive and not proactive. He further expressed that although some of the hip hop music is alright, some of it isn't. He stressed that they needed to look at other solutions to the problem, because a curfew is only one solution. He questioned what will happen after that. He relayed that he has

often heard that people are sick and tired of the politics in the city. He offered his phone number should anyone wish to contact him for further discussion - (203) 685-5664.

Dawn Spearman - stated that she was there on behalf of ten (10) mothers that have lost a child to violence. She said she understood that part of the problem comes from the home; however, she said there were many women in her group that are single mothers and there for their kids. She urged the enforcement of the curfew along with other solutions.

Co-chair Paoletto thanked everyone for coming out to speak; the parents, members of the community and especially the young people. He reiterated that they weren't voting on the item tonight because the matter is still in committee.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER COLON MOVED TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING**
**** COUNCIL MEMBERS TAYLOR-MOYE SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The public hearing was closed at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services